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Abstract

To determine the attitudes of teenagers toward their hometown newspapers was the purpose of this study. A four-page questionnaire in which students compared the local newspaper with other news media and expressed their attitudes on statements about this newspaper was answered by 887 teenagers. Tentative conclusions indicated that the students felt that radio provided the quickest local news coverage; that news magazines provided the most detailed non-local coverage; and that the local television station gave the most accurate and best balanced coverage of all news, gave the quickest coverage of non-local news, and was the best all-around news medium. A majority of the students felt that the hometown newspaper (1) provided the most detailed coverage and the highest number of local news stories, (2) ranked next to television as the best all-around medium, (3) kept the public well-informed about state and local government, (4) did not present both sides of a story, (5) did not have the community's best interests at heart, (6) did not boost the spirits of its readers, and (7) was the most obnoxious news medium. Almost half felt that the newspaper did not keep the public well-informed about the high school and that it treated wealthy people in the news better than poor ones. (LH)

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TEENAGERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE HOMETOWN DAILY NEWSPAPER

A Quill and Scroll Study

By Laurence R. Campbell

1. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of teenagers toward their hometown daily newspapers.

2. Method

With the cooperation of six high school teachers in Florida and six not in Florida a 4-page questionnaire with answer sheets was circulated among teenagers in twelve high schools. A minor part of the questionnaire concerned the topic of this report.

3. Scope

A total of 887 teenagers participated of which 63 per cent were girls and 72 per cent were 16 or 17 years old. They were invited to compare their hometown daily newspaper with other news media as this summary indicates. They also were invited to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about that newspaper.

4. Attitudes

The percentages of teenagers who reported various attitudes are summarized here:

Most satisfactory all-round news medium: local television, 42; local daily, 22; newsmagazine, 13; local radio, 12; don't know, 11.

Most obnoxious news medium: local daily, 24; local radio, 17; local television, 14; newsmagazine, 10; don't know, 35.

Most accurate local coverage: local television, 43; local daily, 30; local radio, 12; newsmagazines, 3; don't know, 18.

Most unbiased local coverage: local television, 34; local radio, 26; local daily, 12; newsmagazines, 7; don't know, 21.

Greatest number of local news stories: local daily, 59; local television, 16; local radio, 15; newsmagazines, 3; don't know, 7.

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Most detailed local coverage: local daily, 55; local television, 27; local radio, 10; newsmagazines, 3; don't know, 5.

Quickest local coverage: local radio, 68; local television, 20; local daily, 6; newsmagazine, 2; don't know, 4.

Most detailed non-local coverage: newsmagazines, 35; local television, 27; local daily, 23; local radio, 5; don't know, 8.

Quickest non-local coverage: local television, 45; local radio, 34; local daily, 6; newsmagazines, 5; don't know, 10.

Most accurate non-local coverage: local television, 35; newsmagazines, 24; local daily, 16; local radio, 10; don't know, 15.

Most unbiased non-local coverage: local television, 34; newsmagazines, 18; local radio, 14; local daily, 10; don't know, 24.

The local daily presents both sides of the news: strongly agree, 7; agree, 24; don't know, 19; disagree, 31; strongly disagree, 19.

The local daily presents both sides of news of race problems: strongly agree, 6; agree, 34; don't know, 21; disagree, 25; strongly disagree, 14.

The wealthy man gets better treatment than the poor man in the local daily: strongly agree, 20; agree, 26; don't know, 25; disagree, 22; strongly disagree, 7.

The local daily keeps the public well-informed about the work of city and county government: strongly agree, 14; agree, 48; don't know, 18; disagree, 13; strongly disagree, 7.

Controversial news is printed in the local daily without regard to its possible effect on advertising: strongly agree, 7; agree, 17; don't know, 44; disagree, 24; strongly disagree, 8.

The local daily keeps the public well-infromed about our school: strongly agree, 7; agree, 30; don't know, 15; disagree, 31; strongly disagree, 17.

The local daily publishes too much news about non-local crime: strongly agree, 6; agree, 11; don't know, 28; disagree, 47; strongly disagree, 8.

The local daily often gives me a "lift" and makes me feel that goodness rules the world more than hate and greed: strongly agree, 4; agree, 8; don't know, 18; disagree, 35; strongly disagree, 35.

The local daily puts the best interests of the community above its personal interests: strongly agree, 4; agree, 18; don't know, 28; disagree, 23; strongly disagree, 27.

5. Conclusions

These tentative conclusions may be considered:

1) The number who reported "don't know" or gave no answer ranged from 4 per cent to 44 per cent.

2) The local television station ranks first as the most satisfactory all-round news medium. The hometown daily ranks second.

3) The hometown daily newspapers rank first as the most obnoxious medium, although more than one-third answered "don't know" to this question.

4) The local television station is rated as the most accurate and most unbiased in local coverage. It won the same rating for non-local news coverage in both instances.

5) The hometown daily newspaper was rated first for the number of local stories covered, and for detailed coverage.

6) The newsmagazine was rated first for detailed non-local coverage.

7) The radio was rated first for quickest local coverage but television was rated first for quickest non-local coverage.

8) Half of the teenagers do not believe that the hometown daily newspaper presents both sides of the news.

9) Teenagers are almost evenly divided on the issue of whether the hometown daily newspaper presents both sides of the race issue.

10) Three out of five teenagers believe the hometown daily newspaper keeps the public well-informed about city and county government.

11) Nearly one-half of them do not believe the hometown daily newspaper keeps the public well-informed about their high school.

12) Nearly one-half believe that the hometown daily newspaper gives better treatment to a wealthy man than a poor man.

13) One-half of the teenagers do not believe that the hometown daily newspaper has the best interests of the community at heart, but they are uncertain as to whether advertisements affect editorial policies.

14) Seven out of ten deny that the hometown daily newspaper gives them a "lift" or that it convinces them that "goodness rules the world more than hate or greed."

Perhaps these attitudes are similar to those of parents, peers, teachers, and neighbors. Perhaps they are based upon teenagers' impressions as consumers of American mass media.